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Metamorphosis

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Rochester Institute of Technology

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
In Candidacy for the Degree of**

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

“METAMORPHOSIS”

By

Chang, Ching-Yuan
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Introduction

Coming from Taiwan, Republic of China, I was raised in a very traditional family . All my perspectives of human life were very much oriented in this tradition. Since the fall of 1988, I have been exposed to a extremely new environment. The structure of American society not only gave me culture shock but also change my view point of the relationships between man and society.

Childhood:

Going back into childhood, my impression of the adult world was one of sacrifice. The adults in my family seemed to give up their life goals in order to make a living. Their choices of an occupation and survival were the complete opposite of who they were and what they wanted the most in life. The question of how to live and succeed in a capitalistic society and yet still remain yourself , was very strong in my mind. I was afraid for my future because I did not want to follow in their foot steps.

When I was nine, I began playing with art materials such as wood, wire, bamboo, clay, and paper. These were used on my grandfather's farm for making tools. I enjoyed creating with my own hands. Another inspiration came from my first art teacher who sparked our creative interest by telling us traditional Chinese stories. Creating objects with those materials was the only thing that could hold my attention for a entire day. This concentration led to my decision to attend art school.

Educational Background

After high school, my goal was to major in art at college. To do this, I had to take the National Test. The Educational department decided your major by your test grade. Students are not allowed to switch majors in college. Due to the grade from the test, I was sent to the Industrial Design Department. I found myself in the design department where I felt a sense of unease. There was a lingering feeling that I was not doing what I really wanted. I felt that there must be some other form of expression that could better communicate what I wanted to say. While I was unsure what that form was, I knew it would not be found by designing products for the commercial market.

In the words of Rousseau, “ *I am a man like other men but I am also different. it asserted itself in revolt against the conditions of actuality which might be commonplace, the restrictions of convention, or the artificiality of life.* ”¹

The only pleasurable thing that I could get from school was the study of art history and traditional craftsmanship. I was able to take electives in Ceramics. Clay became the appropriate medium for me to experiment with. I discovered the unique quality of clay, its plasticity, and then learned to give it texture, color, and form. Using clay allowed me to make what ever I wanted. I realized clay can give form and texture like stone or steel. As with painting, the glaze can achieve color and surface.

The Visit In Japan

After winning 1st place in a ceramics competition, I was invited by the Japanese Shippo Wheel Company to visit Japan in 1985. It was a great experience for me to visit all the ceramic villages , such as Bizen, Shigaraki, Mashiko, Kasama, and Seto. While visiting, I had the chance to have some conversations with the new generation of Japanese ceramics society called “Sodesha”. One thing that struck me about their work was their adaptation of traditional techniques into sculpture. The main emphasis in their work was sculpture made from clay. Seeing their work and studying their history, encouraged me to break from utilitarian function of clay and move toward making my own sculpture.

Finding my aesthetic direction:

After this trip, I was left with the question of what is contemporary Chinese ceramics? Living in the late 20th century with a traditional Chinese background I needed to find the right vocabulary for my work.

“To learn but still to control so strong a tradition is a challenge “

----- Isamu Noguchi 2

I tried to achieve a more personal aesthetic by working with non-functional vessels. However this method was not the right vehicle for my thoughts. By confronting this issue, I tried to re-examine the Western methodologies that were stressed in school. I was attempting to discover how I should work as an artist. By eliminating the techniques mastered in school, I hoped to discover my true thoughts and creativity. I wanted to be an artist and not strictly a crafts person. I looked back to my Chinese heritage and the Western sculpture. What attracted me to contemporary American ceramic sculpture, was the increase in scale and volume. Technological advances in construction and firing contributed to overcoming the difficulties inherent in working with clay of great height and weight. Working with sculpture, gave me the whole new perspective. I could enjoy the new process of creating. I always discover the next step by examining the finished pieces. It made me keep challenging myself and developing new thoughts.

Coming to The United States:

My interest in coming to the united States to study was inspired by George Geyer and Tom McMillin's art works in the Ceramics Monthly magazine.

" The emphasis on allowing natural phenomena to alter form and surface has its roots in the rituals of pre-technological societies as well as in the Earth works of Robert Smithon, whose spiral Jetty of 1970 extended into a salt lake and linked art and nature." 3

" Inherent in a process where variables of natural forces--- wind, rain,tides---determine the final structure is the metaphoric association with the temporal aspect of all life on earth. These two Artists who have broken from the security of fired, functional objects to explore clay as a medium for didactic and environmental concept. Not trained as fine artists in the usual sense, they see their ceramics education as paradoxically essential to dealing with art issues. While pioneering concepts that incorporate scientific and ecological information, George and Tom emphasize the beauty in the metamorphosis and fragility of earth materials." 4

In destruction lies the essence of what George and Tom intended, a partnership with natural phenomena in which the artists (at a certain point) allow forces beyond their control to determine the final structure. Inherent in such a process are the variables of weather, the emotional impact of natural forces and metaphoric association with the temporal aspect of all life on earth.

The concepts of these artists parallel those of Chinese Taoism philosophy. In my opinion both artist give new meaning to clay. Their method of work allows the clay its own personality which is traditionally the Chinese way.

Metamorphosis:

The thought process:

While studying at the R.I.T., I explored my interest in sculpture. I had done numerous experiments with color, form, and scale in clay. After a critique of some finished pieces I realized the tendency I had towards enlarging the scale, as well as a strong influence from my landscape painting.

Outdoor sculpture became my main interest. I wanted to break away from the work that would be displayed on a pedestal. I became interested in the possibilities of outdoor sculpture, and wanted to focus more on nature, environment, and landscape as reference. Another aspect of my work that came into focus was the social, and political activities around me. The issues of contemporary American art society includes politics, capitalism, sexuality, and censorship. From my classes in contemporary issues I learned to research and debate the specific issues reflected in Western art. However, I was unable to incorporate the ideologies of a new environment into my own work. Because I am a Chinese I did not grow up in this society. I could not honestly place American thoughts into my own art work. In order to express popular Western issues I would have been forced to give up my personal character, which I was unable and unwilling to do. Meanwhile, I tried to re-examine the way I felt about the position of art in Taiwan. The one connection I could make between the separate countries was the similar effects commercialism and capitalism had on the art world. These dual “isms” are overbearing to both artist and audience creating the phenomena of art becoming product, while the viewer becomes a consumer. I never considered my work to be a product in the art market, but as a record of my experience. This record represents the world around me and my personal response to the society. It is a diary. My motivation as an artist is rooted in making the best of this life of

mine, this life that I can only live once. Only the processes of thinking, experimenting and creating can make me feel like an artist. There is a feeling that comes out of me, when the actual process of creating has begun. Things do not necessarily turn out as I planned. Curiously, those works that veer from my original intentions are often the most successful.

The physical description:

“Metamorphosis” (See Plate 4 ,5) is based on my personal experience and the relationship between artist and society. The transition of the center pieces symbolizes the process of loss and gain for an artist in society. The opposing colors in this outdoor sculpture represent two extremes of human life. The color red is symbolizes energy, and activity of the young emerging artist. I chose antique bronze to symbolize the aged, experienced artist. The two end pieces with their window like space, gives the audience view through the color connected center pieces. The large red square piece symbolizes the artist who can honestly express his or her idea, despite their inability to become accepted by the art system. These artists are best described as romantic. The antique bronze piece represents the artist who has gone through the experience of survival in the art society. They have gained acceptance by the society, but their works are confined by their market or reputation.

In my thesis “ Metamorphosis “ I am expressing my personal response to this society. The physical process of a metamorphosis ties in with the process of my thought. From childhood to the concept of an art work, the transformation of reality is constant. In choosing this concept I hope to describe an impression and a view point of every aspect of life.

Technical reference:

Working with outdoor sculptures, I needed an appropriate clay body and specific color. This clay body needed strength for large scale construction.

The clay body that I used was developed in my first year at R. I. T. During that time, I was unable to understand and utilize all the materials. So, I took some of the clay bodies that I found in the books and magazines. Meanwhile, I had done test firings and discussed results with Professor Schmitz. As a result of these tests, I developed and chose to use a simple clay body recipe. I chose the simplest one, because I needed approximately 5000 pounds of clay. A simple formula would be easier to mix and get the same consistency. The recipe was:

NARCO	-----	100	pounds
Howthorne	-----	100	
Red art	-----	100	
kynite	-----	100	
35m Grog	-----	50	
100m Grog	-----	100	

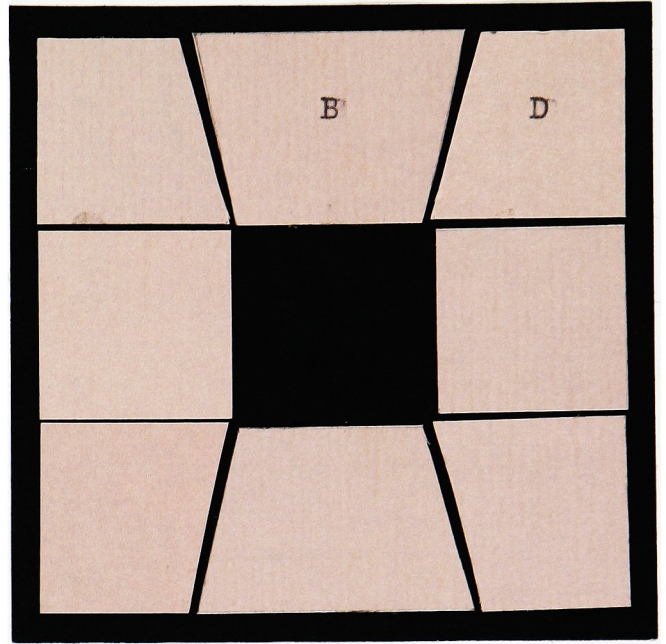
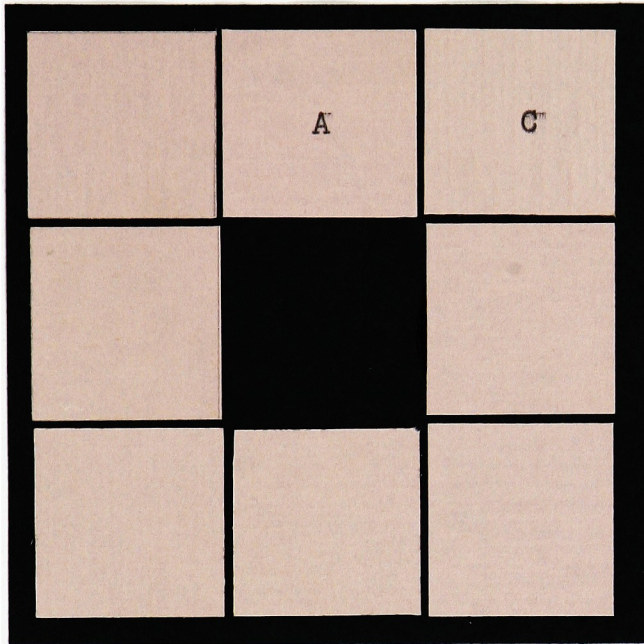
The total shrinkage of this clay body was 4% to cone 3-5 and 3% to cone 04. The absorption was more than 25% at cone 04 and approximately 15% at cone 3. The theory was that a more porous body was able to withstand the expansion and contraction of weather freezing and throwing. After the first piece was finished, I found that the top shrank 1% more than the bottom. To resolve this problem, I had to turn it up side down in order to get the perfect square form after it dried. In regard to surface treatment; I decided to use black slip with red and antique bronze paint. First, I covered the surface with black slip and fire to cone 3. The recipe of the slip I used is:

Red art-----	80
Red iron oxide-----	5
Black copper oxide-----	5
Cobalt oxide-----	2.5
Manganese dioxide-----	2.5

I painted opposing sides of the center piece with the red and antique bronze paint.

The scale of these center pieces were 33 inches square. There was no electric kiln large enough to fit these pieces. It was difficult to control the atmosphere in a gas kiln. Reduction can have adverse effects on earthenware glazes. Anyway, the main theme of this work was purely sculpture. So, I decided to use car paint which would give me the same result, and be even more controllable and predictable.

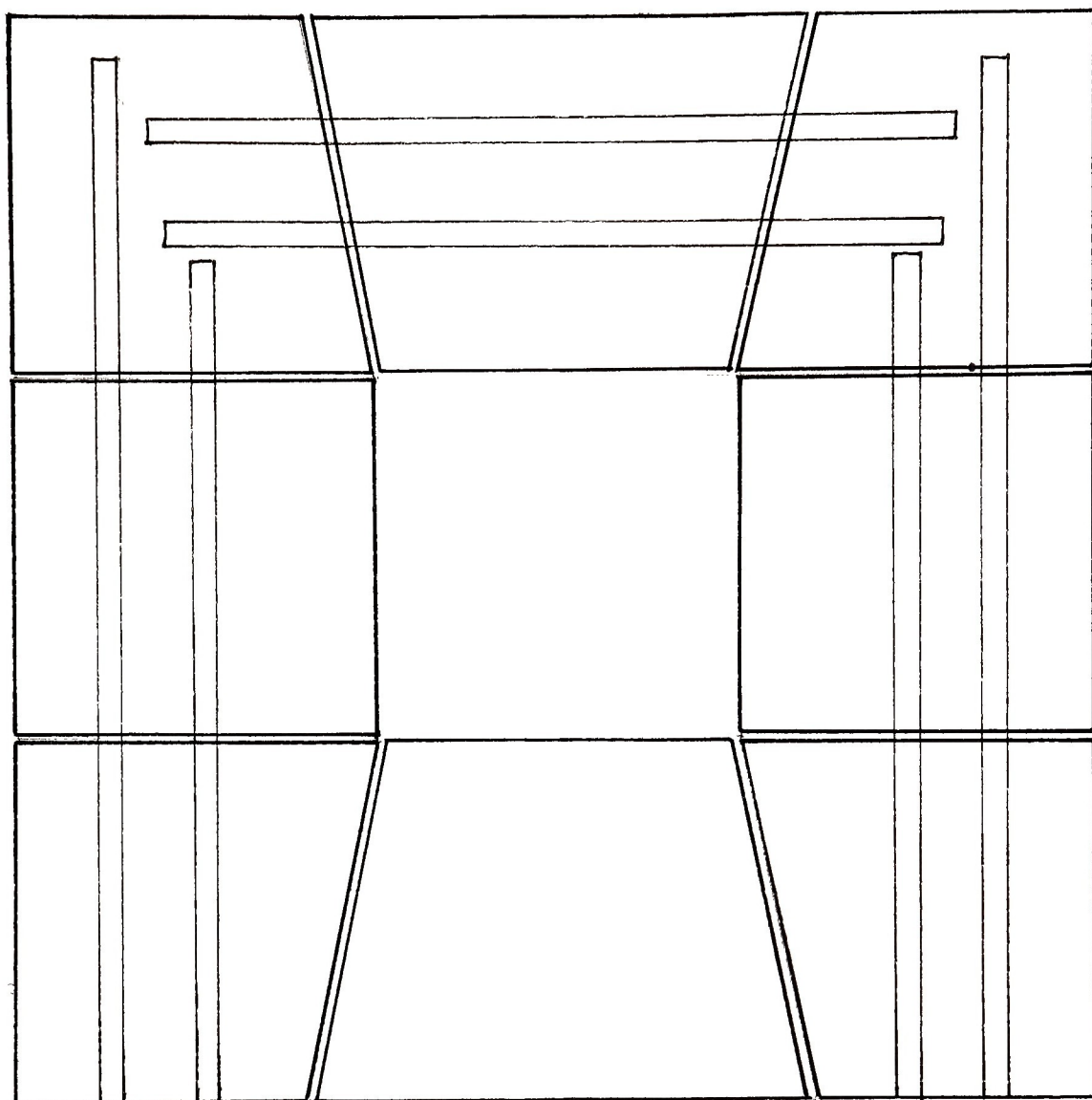
“Metamorphosis” was made with the press mold method in 23 sections. I actually made 25 of them. The extra two pieces gave me the chance to experiment the color of the slip and paint. Meanwhile, I could use these two pieces to replace the failed or damaged piece from the firing process.



See Diagram

Before I constructed the two end pieces, I had a meeting with the members of my thesis committee. In order to make the end piece stable, I change the section A to section B, and section C to section D (see diagram above) The new structure, gave the pieces more strength when they were assembled.

I used 2 inches diameter plumbing pipes for the interior structure as the following diagram:



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